

Waste Not - Want Not

Reduce your trash footprint

By Nicole Person

The US accounts for only five percent of the world's population but uses 25 percent of its resources. In 1997, Americans generated 430 pounds of garbage - that's 1600 pounds of trash per person. In order to accommodate our bad habits, we allocate acreage for landfill. One great way to make a difference is to recycle - another is to find ways to avoid making the garbage of the future. Here are some ways to reduce waste:

Avoid junk mail - Get off the mailing lists.

We threw away over 400,000 tons of bulk mail in the US in 1990. Check out this site for contact information for list-purging organizations, www.recyclemore.org and click on the *Unwanted Mail* Link.

Buy bulk

Save space and money by buying only what you need. Buying food in bulk usually means reduced processing, improved freshness and reduced waste. If packaging is unavoidable, look for minimal packaging, reusable or recyclable packaging and packaging with recycled content. For example: Buy milk in toxin-free returnable and refillable glass bottles, instead of paper milk cartons that can't be recycled.

Use it or recycle it

If it's broken - fix it! Channel your inner Martha or pull out the duct tape. Most things (furniture, electronics, clothes, etc.) can be repaired for a lot less than the cost of new stuff. Recycle your living space by donating unwanted clothing, toys and other household items to a local charity.

BYOB

Bring your own beverage (container). Traveling beverages stay fresh and stable in a re-useable coffee or juice mug. Most vendors even provide a discount.

See both sides

Make your own notepads. Paper used on only one side can be turned over, stacked and stapled. Cut into handy sized notepads to keep by the phone.

Return of the shopping bag

Just say no. "No, I don't need one, thank you." Bring reusable bags from home for groceries. Keep bags in your car. Rather than getting a small bag with purchase, carry it home in a pocket or purse.

Born to be trash - Avoid disposables

Rechargeable batteries can be used over and over. No more everlasting plastic wrap - it's not good for you anyway! Use durable glass or plastic containers or recyclable aluminum foil instead. Avoid disposable razors - refill the blades. No more plastic forks or single-use cups and plates! Stock up on washable cloth napkins rather than paper. Reach for a dish towel, sponge or rag instead of a paper towel. (Stained or ripped clothes and sheets make great rags).

Reuse containers

Rinse and reuse margarine tubs, yoghurt containers and glass jars and bottles for storing food, hardware, craft supplies, etc. Use film containers for storing seeds, safety pins or camping condiments. Take plastic bags on walks with your dog. Or rinse and reuse plastic produce bags and use them on your next shopping trip.

Oddments: Use old coffee filters to line pots before transplanting - keeps soil in the pot. Reuse water bottles; refill from a large container rather than purchasing more small ones. Compost vegetable waste as well as food-damaged paper. If you're an apartment dweller, save compost materials with gardening friends or share tea leaves or coffee grounds with the houseplants.